



Songs of Aphrodite

MARGARET SACKVILLE

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A

Songs of Aphrodite

By the Same Writer

A HYMN TO DIONYSUS, AND OTHER POEMS

BERTRUD, AND OTHER DRAMATIC POEMS

HILDRIS, THE QUEEN

LYRICS

Songs of Aphrodite

and Other Poems

BY

MARGARET SACKVILLE



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NOTE

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following poems.*

SONGS OF APHRODITE

THE SHIP OF DREAMS

O GOLDEN Argosy!—
Thou ship of joy, white-winged, with shining bows
None know thee here, nor guess
What foam of what far waters clings to thee,
Nor what strange weeds are these which deck thy prow's
Cold carven loveliness.

And yet I know thee—know
Thy white sails, and the heavy scent of spice
Clinging about thee; yea
Remember how upon thee, silent, slow
Tears fell from Helen's eyes,
When on her cheek she felt the alien spray.

Ah! but return, return!

Thou with the freightage of grave dreams, for here
Shall no white-browed, gold-sandalled merchants come

To greet thee, nor fire burn

On the high altars of gray fanes austere—

Nor any prayer call thee home.

I only, who by night

And day have waited without flower or song
Thy coming, now shall set

My feet upon thy decks and in swift flight
Sail, sail for those far shores for which I long,
Without farewell—without regret.

I

THIS song is yours:

Take it;—a home-returning bird,
Whose wings 'mongst storm-tossed plumage hold
The pearly glint of silver hours,
The murmur of many worshippers which stirred
Some dream-lit shrine of old.

These gifts it brings

From journeys made flying far south,
What are they but memory?—
Such songs the silence sings
In desert places—the wind's mouth
Has breathed them to the sea.

Faint notes, no more
Than wind or flying spray repeat
An exiled music, wild, divine:—
Now to this homeward shore
And to thy friend who watches there, beat, beat
On longing pinions, bird of mine!

To such a land
So wrapt in quiet, each day falls
Tender as slumber; listen! Deep
Sighing over white sand
And through green olive-groves how the sea calls
In a low voice like sleep.

But lest thou break
The silence, let thy pinions move
So delicately, thou shalt come
As in half-sleep to one not yet awake,
The footsteps of returning love,
One early morning to thy home.

II

PRESS open the closed door:—

Enter:—the sun and wind likewise

Shall enter; the wind's beat

So like great wings shall sweep across the floor

That thou shalt think a wounded eagle lies

In death-throes at thy feet.

This forlorn shrine

Is marked by prayer; its altar set

Where the last, lingering

Rays of the sun fall on it, red like wine,

The winds up-trailing from the sea leave wet

With the salt gifts they bring.

Some god unknown

Wakes in the silence, wakes and hears

Monotonously

Dripping on the white stone,

Like water falling the slow years

And the long crying of the sea.

Ah! rest thy head

On the last altar step and there

Forget the goal is far and still to seek:—

To thee on thy hard bed

Shall come an answer to that secret prayer,

Thy lips might never speak.

III

AH! Day forlornly bright!

Still without peace, when thou hast found,

—Thy sad face hidden in thy folded wings,—

How quietly Twilight

Rises and without sound

Heals with the breath of cooling water-springs,—

Tell me, for I would know,

What reverie marred thy peace

Through the long hours? The sun

Seemed dimmed with tears which might not flow—

Dost thou remember Greece?

Hast thou not yet forgotten Ilion?

What fervour spent
Once in grave cities, white and bare,
Throned 'mongst unfamiliar blue,
Has touched with discontent
Thy summer-laden, sun-drenched careless air,
O Day! until the dream showed through?

What gold, long lost
Of divine elder dawns,
The shining, wind-blown sweep of other skies,
Has made of thee a ghost,
Alien and silent on our Northern lawns
With wide, indifferent, proud, unseeing eyes?

IV

THIS drowsy pool,
Caught in a woven mesh of sun and shade,
With rustling reeds upon the brink,
Seems in its loveliness remote and cool,
Of some white, fallen moonlight made
Where thirsty dreams may drink.

It waits, I know,
The coming of divinity,
Waits, whispers, sighs,
Till hither, with gold hair a-blow,
Artemis, wading to the knee
Shall come, and smile upon it with kind eyes.

The wistful sweep
Of its long, soundless ripples brood
Upon the god who comes not yet,
Not yet,—but homing sheep,
With plaintive cries disturb its solitude
Each evening, at sunset.

Unknown, unsought,
Whose waves no white-limbed goddess cleaves apart
Yet made for some diviner state,
This pool of fallen moonbeams wrought,
Is desolate. I know.—O heart!
Dost thou not also wait?

V

O WIND for ever blowing South!
The year trails doubtful fire
Through the thin woods, and wan
Hovers with heavy eyes and close-shut mouth,
But your wide wings of rapture and desire
No shadow falls upon.

What would you have
O honey-sweet
Wind of passion and unrest?
For *thee* the wine-dark wave
Round sparkling shores where song and slumber meet
On dreaming islands of the blest.

For *me* this old

Green, quiet garden where forgotten, lost

Days linger delicately through

Seasons of bronze and gold;

And life half-passion, half-regret

Hears but may not follow you.

You far from these, remote

Lost paths of solitary shade which ring

With that bright ecstasy of thine.—

Let song up-leap like flame from thy full throat!

Yet lure me not, O Youth! O Spring!

Out from the silence which is mine.

VI

O! SOFT impalpable
Mist lightly drawn
Over the sun's unseeing eyes!—
How may one tell
Whether 'tis eve or dawn
Droops hesitating from the skies?

The shadows flow
About me broodingly, I turn
My steps with head bowed low and wait
Dumb in the outer court; I dare not go
To see if fires still burn
Within the temple gate.

VII

WITHIN my hand
Against the changing sky's clear blue,
A circlet of fine gold
Dug from the haunted bosom of this land;
So delicate the light shows through,
A royal thing, I hold.

I dare not weep
And I must curb my dreams; may be
In this small ring of captive flame
A soul still lies asleep,
Which all the sand and all the cold, wan sea
Could neither change nor tame.

O secret gleam!

Imprisoned here lost life of song or fire

Lest some chance thought of mine, some errant touch

Wake thee, I will put out my dream:

I fear to see made visible the desire

Which I have longed for over-much!

VIII

O! PEARLY bright
Day of all joy, whose shining steps I track
Through wind-swept paths—my day!
When your too-sparkling plumes which drop delight
Shall fall, shall fade at last and I turn back,
How if I miss the way?

My feet unused
To any save summer wanderings,
My heart, whose wayward beat
Is like the pulse which in the purple-juiced
Grape's sun-warmed cluster leaps and stings—
What of the night, O heart! O feet?

So lonely there

Among the melancholy mists which watch

In silence till the winds begin!—

I know not if I dare

Return and lift the latch

And very simply enter in.

IX

How will she gaze,
This foam-white goddess, myrtle-crowned of ours
Upon the slender gift we bring?
Plucked in far distant ways,
Frail, scented, passionless sweet flowers
From gray-green gardens in the Spring?

She has not seen
In all her golden land such gold—
Beneath her sombre trees was spread
Never such riot of rebellious green
Like laughter, nor have Spring's soft tides unrolled
In such wild breakers overhead.

Nor do her fields

Elysian, of faint-scented asphodel,

These bright, unmelting drops of snow

Bear—if crushed myrtle yields

Scent which is love remembered, what dreams dwell

In these spare odours that we know ?

From paler lands

And many a quiet country side,

No gift, no gift of flame we bear

To her who is all flame. Our hands

Are empty, yet, ah me ! what dreams may hide

In unknown blossoms brought to her !

X

BUT in the end,
After triumphant labour set
High overhead, and loud acclaim,
I think that you, my friend,
Will smilingly forget
All trouble—even fame!

Turning the bows
Of your brave ship which has not veered
From its straight course though all winds blew,
Towards a little, silent house,
Your quiet dreams have reared
On Grecian shores to welcome you.

Where, so at peace,
Veiled in blue light your days shall pass
'Mongst trees dropping golden fruit,
O lover of old Greece!
You shall remember what life was
In ancient paths ere Pan was mute.

And where, may be
In that soft-breasted, shimmering land,
Some morning when the dream lasts long,
'Twixt Bay and Myrtle tree,
Cool-throated, and white-girdled one shall stand
With eyes of flame and heart of song.

SYRINX

I AM Syrix: I am she who when the gold,
Glad sun over the mountains burns awake,
Rises and drives the slow flocks from the fold;

And all day long hidden in the green brake
Watches, or where the wood's heart grows so still
That the least tremor of small leaves ashake,

Seems somehow a foreboding of strange ill.—
And I am she who gleans the scattered wheat,
And prunes the vines on the steep side of the hill.

I follow the white morning on swift feet,
I slumber in the thicket at mid-noon,
The racing wind bears me along with it.

And, for the gods' delight, under the moon
I dance, dance and laugh to feel my hot
Heart leaping frenzied to the wild pipes' tune.

But as for Love, truly I know him not,
I have passionately turned my lips therefrom,
And from that fate the careless gods allot

To woman. Love who has taken the world by storm,
For all his fury of blind wind and flood,
Has had no power to change me or deform.

For the chill mountain-streams are in my blood,
And pale, phantasmal fires of dawn, twilight,
Shadow and dew are all my maidenhood.

And as the setting sun on the cold, white,
Snow-braided, frozen peak rests his fierce head,
Then goes out in a wild trail of light;

So Love, leaning upon my heart, instead
Of flame finds only snow and falls asleep
Quietly, like a child on a soft bed,

And lies there forgetting the broad sweep
At noon-tide of his sudden blazing wings,
Which thought my narrow life to over-leap—

Not knowing me tameless as the breeze which clings
Round Summer's golden limbs when she moves clad
In music wonderfully, where the pine-branch swings.

What thing is this therefore which has made me mad,
So that no laughter of the rose-crowned year
Shall evermore rejoice me or leave glad

My heart which now has a sick core of fear?—
I am Syrinx: a strange doom is over me
Like a cloud, hanging about me everywhere:

Yea, listen and marvel how such things may be!—
I am bewildered and all overcast
As a spent swimmer struck sideways by the sea.

For lately, as through the dim wood I passed
Singing, for it was June, and ah, June goes!—
And only song may capture and bind her fast—

I paused: there was no stir among the close
Boughs; for the heat nothing alive might breathe,
And the least wind swooned backward as it rose.

Outside the sick earth seemed to burn and seethe
Like molten metal in a pot. I saw
The sun, a wild beast with sharp shining teeth,

Eagerly search the barren land and draw
What of green might still be left therein,
To cool the rage of his insatiate maw.

Yet, through the leaves, his rays on my white skin
Played harmless and I sang—sang—till a sound
Fell on my ears and made me reel and spin—

Low laughter welling lightly from the ground
Like water—mocking, sweet, and crystalline
As though up-bubbling from earth's heart profound—

And in it something bestial and divine,
So that my senses hearing it were stirred,
Quickened and overcome, as though with wine—

And motionless I stood even as a bird
Beneath a snake's eye—then when life began
To fail within me, once again I heard

That laughter and saw, crouched there before me, Pan!—
The very shepherd and godhead of our hills
Whom I have feared more than the Cyprian!

Since his is the sharp secret breath which kills
At nightfall, and he is lord of death and birth,
And the year wanes and waxes as he wills—

Yea, he is the very spirit and heart of earth,
And cruel as the untempered rain and sun,
In those sick seasons when all falls to dearth.

And there shall none resist him—nay not one
On whom rest the eyes of his desire—
Wherefore am I too ruined and undone;

For though a little I may escape his fire,
Since he in subtle-wise let me depart
That morning, helpless am I though I fly higher

Than the eagle, yea or press the waves apart,
—The cold, dark, clean, indifferent sea-waves—
Nay, though I shelter in the whirlwind's heart—

Pan, Pan shall have at last the thing he craves
Me—and my shadowy days must sink to naught,
Falling earthwards like shed leaves when the wind raves.

Yet might these weary toils wherein I am caught
Break, break!—Would that I might become
A shadow or fast fading flower wrought

From day and night, or sunshine or blown foam
Ere this thing chanced—or a clear drop of rain
New scattered—or music suddenly fallen dumb—

A note of music by its own breath slain,
Blown tenderly from the frail heart of a reed,
Whereof the singing shepherd lads are fain,

Who with strong, careless hands from all toil freed,
Pluck joy, pure joy, green-growing from the soil,
And turn and twist it and shape it to their need.

If this might be! If some kind god would foil
The inexorable purpose of Pan's lust,
Having pity on my young blood's recoil,

My frugal, kindly, passionless days which must
Perish, perish like wild woodberries,
By sharp-shod goat-hoofs trampled all to dust.

If they would sigh towards me, bidding me cease,
Changing into white sap my willing blood,
And granting me the calm of growing trees,

And of the reeds springing in the full flood—
Being myself portion and part of these,
Surely beyond all longing it were good!

I am Syrinx: I am afraid: I would have peace.

THE VICTIM

LET no man's lamentation reach my ears :
I would be quiet now for a long time,
With a great space about me—all the world
Emptied, if it might be, of all sound—
Silence. I ask no more. To-night I die.
Die!—Oh! all ye, my death delivers—think
What thing is this I say : I die to-night!
They said: "The death of one shall save us all."
Sprang my whole soul in answer to my lips:
"No more? Be ye saved then. To-night I perish."

What strange, obscure deep voice spoke through me then,
Through me and through none other—driving me
Like fire, urged terribly by a great wind?
Yea, I was caught up as by a wind

Irresistibly—flame was I, wind-driven
Ever swifter, ever swifter—on—on—on !
Overthrowing all barriers, over-leaping
In my exultation earth's last bounds;
My whole life then was gathered in one word—
Shining forth suddenly like a new star;
So have I lived my whole life in a moment—
Since all my shadowy days which went before
Were but the forerunners of this day:—
And no day dawns to greet me after it.

Would that I could have died—there where I stood
Having spoken, in a flash of joy—sheer flame
Rising from the altar newly fed
With sacred oil—with all the singing choirs
Standing round of priests and people—scent
Of roses and sweet scent of sacrifice
Mingling together and pale incense clouds;
Where are now the singing and the sacrifice,
And the priest feeding the flame with sacred oil?
—Ah! but the flame has sunk almost to ashes.

The flame has sunk—yet I die willingly,
Without fear, regretting not the word
My lips were chosen to cry forth—but now,
In this colder hour, how passionately yearns
Every sense backwards—hungry after life;
Since from the fullness of life I do this thing
And not from any numbness of the blood.
Yea, 'twas my heart's quick beating which chose death—
And I must still remember (who have so loved)
Song and light and laughter and soft speech,
Summer flashing through a mist of flowers,
Night and pale early morning and full-throated
Music, yet from these things avert mine eyes
For ever now, loving you more than these—
Therefore, for the love I bear you, grant me silence.

Not praise. Ah! that most ardently I crave
From ye—that ye praise me not! All has been said;
Let there be no words now. Call not back
Mine eyes straining away from earth—call not
My heart back gradually grown numb with dreams;

I whose hands no more shall gather flowers,
Scatter them no longer under my feet;
I pray you, let there be no palm-branches
Nor any pæan in the market-place.
I hear the small, shrill reedy pipe of death
And would accustom mine ears to the sound of it.
Distract me not; I die for you:—you have
All the years, all overflowing with joy,
Or grief which memory turns almost to joy.
See what a rich gift I bring to you!—No less
Than the whole earth—and in return I ask
Calm and no exultation in the street.
Crowd not, I pray, about me—for I pass
Solitary into the house of death.
I love you—for my love's sake stand far off.
Let me as one of the lonely dead
Walk unaccompanied. I would not go
To the tomb as to a bridal. Praise me not,
But let your silence wrap me round and keep me,
Warm from the winds which beat outside the world.

THE FLIGHT

FOLLOWING! Following!
F I heard the horse-hoofs rise and ring
And rise and fall again and beat,
And strike the sand; they had winged feet
Those horses! I could almost hear
—As it seemed—a rush of wings draw near—
Demons with great pinions spread
To fall on me. On—on I sped!
On I sped, swift as air,
The wind tangled in my hair
Dragged me forwards—I kept pace
With the wind; so fierce a race
'Twixt death and life was never run.
I cried: “ Now surely Death has won!”
And yet I did not die—

Red sand,

Burning hot on either hand!
And the sun angry and red
Fixed just above my head,
Motionless in the still sky;
There was no man in all the world save I,—
Nor sound, save the following
Horse-hoofs' sharp rise and swing—
And a whirr as of great wings behind
Me dragged in the wake of the wind,
With the whole world to ride in—grown
Empty save for us alone—
They who followed—I who fled!

The steady sun above my head
Pressed me down, down, down—the sun
And my enemies were one,
Leagued together for my defeat;
Earth seemed sodden through with heat,
Through and through—yet I rode on!

Whilst red, like madness, the sun shone.

Or like a flame up-blown from Hell.—
My horse stumbled, almost fell,
I was riding with so slack a rein,
Since life seemed hardly worth the strain,
Of this interminable flight.
“At least I shall be dead by night”
I thought—and renewed the flight again.

When suddenly—how did it chance?
I must have fallen into a trance,
Time had slipped from me like a sheath,
Leaving the spirit, crushed beneath
Long dominion, at last free
In a moment from all memory,—
Since nothing I remember more
Till leapt up bright as flame before
My eyes, there at my feet, my own
Whitewalled, battlemented town!—
Ah me! how strangely, strangely gleamed
The shining spires—the walls which seemed
A mirage, impossible as heaven,

To a soul beyond all hope forgiven!
So I pressed on—whilst life began
To fade from me and the tears ran
Down my cheeks like fire as I
Heard the following horse-hoofs die
Slowly, slowly away and cease—
And I stood in the shadow of my trees,
And through the high-arched doorway passed
And swooning over the threshold cast
My body down—safe, safe at last!

THE LION-GODDESS

MY feet were scorched; the white-hot stones forth shone
In the white, beating sunlight, like the scales
Of a great dragon—and on every stone
Seemed lingering still unquenched the fiery trails
Of recent sacrifice;—death everywhere
Lurked, yet neither death nor life in all the place
Stirred, nor living nor dead thing showed here
Save the wind leaping suddenly in my face.
Stone, stone was all about me—columns hurled
Up towards the sky as though in anger cast
Forth from the furnace at the heart of the world
By some mad god of chaos. On I passed,
Straight through the outer gateways. All this white
Stone pressed upon my forehead, savagely,
Like a curse; stretching out from left to right,
The columns lay—then through them like the sea,

Breaking their silence with a roar came sound,
Not very far away. I stumbled on
More eagerly, knowing at last the goal was found,
And my dread pilgrimage of long years done.
This was the shrine of the goddess; I knew well
The roaring of her lions. Ah! but now
Must my heart fail me?—Terribly there fell
The sun's unblinking eye full on my brow,
So that I grasped at shadows for support,
Reeling through the fierce light, whilst still more near
The lions' roaring from the inner Court,
Came, and I knew not whether 'twas hope or fear
That made my limbs so tremble—yet I knew
Somehow an end had come, and now between
An avenue of carven lions, drew
To that last shrine where in the shadow unseen,
She lurks, the tawny goddess, I must seek
Or die!—I saw the doorway gleam and heard
The voices of the lions behind it, weak
At first, then mighty as the wind, which stirred
Echoes through all the temple—then again

Silence. I hastened blindly onwards through
Those shining courtyards of white light; in vain
To turn now or escape because she knew
My coming and awaited me there. Blood
Leapt before my eyes; the scent of wine
Made me mad; I neither paused nor stood,
But passed into the shadow—into the shrine.

LINES

TREAD softly oh! my dancing feet,
Lest your untimely gladness stir
Dust of forgotten men who find death sweet
At rest within their sepulchre!

AT ASSOUAN

1913

THE COMING OF HIPPOLYTUS

THE COMING OF HIPPOLYTUS

PHAEDRA
THE NURSE

SCENE: *A high Tower overlooking the sea.*

PHAEDRA.

THE singing women move about the streets
With gold between their breasts. Their garments sway
About them with little murmurs—as a wind
Murmurs through the deep heart of a forest,
Broken and fugitive and soft. Their song
Is but the wind's murmuring turned to song:
Nurse, is it happiness that bids them sing,
Who sing to welcome thus my lord's return?

THE NURSE.

Wilt thou not also greet King Theseus?

PHAEDRA.

Nay, for the heat lies heavily upon me—
The white heat, the intolerable heat,
The heat which has sucked my soul away from me;
Which melts the stone even. See, it lies
Palpitating along the balustrade.
I cannot raise my hand to sweep away
This lock which presses heavily on my forehead;
I cannot turn my head, nor raise my eyes
Beyond the shadow on the farther wall.
See the great golden banner, how it droops!
There is no veil between the earth and sun.
How should I rouse myself to meet the King?

THE NURSE.

Lady, to show more fair in the King's sight!

PHAEDRA.

Let thy shadow fall betwixt me and the sun.
Speak not to me of Theseus. Am I not
Phaedra, God's daughter? Is not my face white,

Consumed and wasted as a funeral pyre,
Because the blood beneath it burns it to ashes?
Like flakes of fire my days are falling from me,
Visibly one by one, since god has wrought
Fearfully his being into mine.—
And what have I to do with mortal man?

THE NURSE.

Yet art thou wedded to Theseus and his wife,
And meet it is thy soul should bend to him.

PHAEDRA.

Why did no god come to me? Am I then
Less fair than my sister, who was loved of God?
Is not my heart wild enough, and my love,
Are not its wings strong and tempestuous,
Wide reaching and far roaming o'er hill and sea,
Enough to satisfy any god's desire?
Am I not too a goddess, half-revealed
Through a close clinging veil of irksome flesh,
Which tortures me, till I would fly beyond

The farthest barriers of the confined world?
Does not sharp fire sting me in hands and feet?

THE NURSE.

Thou art ever restless thus—yet turn thy gaze
From the proud heavens which have no care of thee.

PHAEDRA.

For me there is no comfort. I am wrought
With doubtful blood; for me there is no rest,
Not in heaven, nor yet among the shades;
Certainly not on earth. How amongst men
Or gods shall such as I find comfort? How
In whom the god's wars with the woman's blood,
Who even in death shall be a twofold thing?

THE NURSE.

Yet art thou Queen here: thy will made thee Queen.

PHAEDRA.

It was the will of Theseus made me Queen,
Who, being blind, loved me—and I was blind

And saw only the gold shining round his brows,
And saw the brow beneath was calm as death,
And no ambiguous light in the calm eyes;
And I said his calmness shall be to my soul
As twilight soothing with grave hands the sea;—
Now is my soul like a rag torn in shreds.

THE NURSE.

Lovest thou not King Theseus?

PHAEDRA.

I can hate:

I can no longer love. And who am I
To be bound thus to the slow wheel of earth?
I can hate, as a god hates whom men forget,
All men, all gods—but mostly my lord, the King,
Who has brought me weary love and a dull heart.

THE NURSE.

This cup is evil, drink thou not of it.

PHAEDRA.

This cup is evil, I will drink deep of it:
I am outcast from love. Let the sea rage
And the rain beat on the brown earth pitilessly,
They shall not rage or be pitiless as I!

THE NURSE.

Thou art a child, whose quick and petulant speech
Scatters thy soul like sparks. Do I not know thee,
And how thou wert ever thus—yea, and wouldst spurn
With thy uneasy hands even my breast!

PHAEDRA.

Oh peace! How weary am I of mortal speech,
And of the gods who love me not—but I
Care not though all turn from me. Nay, there is one,
One goddess whom I love, even Aphrodite,
Her only do I worship. I have sought
Her temples with white gifts and gifts of fire—
Prayers which gushed forth like blood from a pricked wound,
Yet she hears not—nothing she recks of me!

THE NURSE.

She is a dangerous goddess—speak not of her!

PHAEDRA.

Why wilt thou tarnish life with thy gray tongue?
Her only do I worship. I will go
At once and offer sacrifice. Prepare
Wine and spiced cakes and myrtle wreaths and flowers,
For all my soul is eager to wait on her!

THE NURSE.

Yet canst not meet the King?

PHAEDRA.

Let the King be.—

Nay, but I am weary! nay, I will not go!
How shall Aphrodite help me? She will mock
Me and deny me still. But would I were
Strong like that fierce limbed Queen Hippolyta,
The King once loved, who rules the clamorous tribe

Of Amazons—gaunt women with one breast,
Who war with men and conquer! Yea and Theseus
Brings, does he not, even now from that far land
The son she bore him, grown a man to plague us?—
The gods alone know wherefore

THE NURSE.

It may be
This son shall prove a son to thee and bring
Unto thy manifold heart comfort and love.

PHAEDRA.

To me shall he bring no comfort. How should one
Sprung from King Theseus bring me comfort? Yet
Surely a strange soul must be his—conceived
In a womb not used to child-bearing, and reared
With dangers for his play-fellows since birth.
He must be like those winds which haunt the rocks,
Like storm and mist and darkness and the fierce
Sun burning the highest pinnacles of the hills!

THE NURSE.

Behold, they come! and lo! King Theseus' brow
Is cloudy, seeing thee not: crane forth thy head!

PHAEDRA.

[She advances to the balcony and looks over.]

Ah! he is straight as a young sapling—a tree
Shining white in a dark wood! I have seen his eyes
Once, in a wild dream I had once—and his lips
A little cruelly curved, like a drawn bow;
His hand, which would not spare though it should smite
Her he loved—yea deeper, because he loved her,
Would he smite, and no pity dim those eyes of his.—
I hate him from the bottom of my soul!

THE NURSE.

Wilt thou not go to meet thy lord?

PHAEDRA.

I hate
Him from the bottom of my soul. Give me
My veil and crown—I go to meet my lord.

ORPHEUS AMONG THE SHADES

ORPHEUS AMONG THE SHADES

ORPHEUS
AIDONEUS
PERSEPHONE
EURYDICE
THREE SHADES

SCENE: *Hades.* ORPHEUS *stands before the thrones of*
AIDONEUS *and* PERSEPHONE. *He lays aside his instru-*
ment.

ORPHEUS.

SO is the song finished.

AIDONEUS.

A grievous thing,
And foolish is this prayer of thine! What profit
Findest thou then in all the ways of earth,
Since woefully men live there and lament,

Continually, and fill with tears their days?
 Nay, though the seasons quicken and fresh winds
 Stir, and though flowers fill the waving fields
 With scent, and blue waters turn to fire at dawn,
 All this shall not check one least pang of grief.
 If a man sorrow how shall he gather flowers?
 But here is neither sorrow nor desire,
 Only silence folding the spent souls in mist.
 They feel no more—the mist so shuts them in—
 Wilt thou teach Eurydice again to weep?

PERSEPHONE.

She is the fairest of my hand-maidens!

ORPHEUS.

Give me Eurydice!

AIDONEUS.

Did I not pity
 Her brow and hands, too fragile and too white
 To bear the burdens of the outer world—

PERSEPHONE.

She is the fairest of my hand-maidens:
I will not part from her. There clings about her
A faint scent as of Autumn roses. Pale
And perfumed is she like faint hawthorn blossom.
Seeing her eyes I think upon the sea—
The sea which splashes the bright shores of Enna;
I would she too might taste that pomegranate
I tasted—taking 'twixt her lips the seed
Which made mine crimson. So might she no more
Escape nor ever rise to earth again.
I shall not—wherefore then should *she* escape?
My feet will never linger in long grass
Any more, nor tread the sea's brink any more;
How should hers therefore? Am I not more than she?

AIDONEUS.

Thou hearest the will of Persephone? Abstain
From thine audacious prayers and get thee hence,
Where thou must wait till thine appointed hour

Brings thee back hither—thou thyself a shade—
Till then thou shalt not clasp Eurydice.

A SHADE [*pressing forward*].

I have a lover in the outer world,
I too—I too! I pray thee bid him sorrow
No more for me, since these gray, gradual mists
Have wholly quenched my love. I sorrow not.

ANOTHER SHADE.

O kindly Stranger!——

ANOTHER [*pressing in front of the Second*].

Nay, but hear my word!

Nay, I *will* speak before the spark dies out
Thy music has kindled in my heart——

SECOND SHADE.

And mine!

Oh! search my lover out and say I seek
Often entrance to his dreams, bid him not shut me out—
Bid him to think of me often and I will come.

THIRD SHADE.

My lover has shut me out from all his dreams!

ORPHEUS.

I will die now—so shall our mutual shades
Intermingle for ever. Thou, Aidoneus,
Breathe on me and slay me. Make me one
With her and spare not. Let us henceforth be
Two streams in Hell, gray, sunless, and austere,
Or weakly blowing winds, or foamless waves.
Only compel me not to bear to earth
My grievous loss again: I conjure thee
Drive me not up where the sun shines to die!

AIDONEUS.

This is the resting place of Death: not here
Shall Death slay men. Arise, and get thee hence!
Trouble us not with singing any more;
Thy singing has brought life into her eyes
And soon she will remember.

PERSEPHONE [*to herself, brooding*].

Ah! the lift
Of the great pine-boughs seen against the sky!

ORPHEUS [*aside*].

How may one reach them? Nay, but I will sing
Again till the waste veins of Aidoneus
Shall feel the song like blood flow quick in them.
I will sing him into dreaming that his sweet
White-browed Persephone, crowned with white flowers,
Has left untasted the red pomegranate—
And he shall dream himself alone in Hell!

[*He turns to AIDONEUS.*

Yet since thou wilt not grant my prayer, once more
Let me sing—emptying thus my heart a little
Of some of its consuming grief. Let me
Leave something of my woe even in this place!

PERSEPHONE.

Yea, thou shalt sing again. It is my will.

[ORPHEUS *plays*. THE SHADES *gather and press*

around him as though for a moment they were again alive. Dark tears roll at last from the eyes of AIDONEUS. PERSEPHONE has risen and stands with arms outstretched. The music ceases.

AIDONEUS.

No more!

I will not feel such pain. I will not suffer
Even in thought these pangs! Oh! misery
Of intolerable desire, never appeased!
Its fury is upon me. Orpheus
Save me from the brink of such despair,—
Save me, for I am torn by wild beasts' fangs!

ORPHEUS.

I stand upon the brink of such despair.

PERSEPHONE [*suddenly coming to herself*].

Give me thy lute that I may break it. Give
Me thy lute and cease thy singing. I
Will hear no more. Wilt thou not pause at last

From torturing me? What need was there to sing
—Since I had half forgotten—how I, even I,
Might have escaped back to the earth and back
To the sun sparkling on the sea, and back
To my mother, to my mother and human love!—
Ah! make me forget again and thou shalt take
Eurydice to thy living breast and arms!
Make me instantly forget. I would forget
All sights, all sounds of the beloved earth!

THE FIRST SHADE.

The sheltering mists have fallen away from me!

SECOND SHADE.

Woe, woe! to see his face only in dreams!

THIRD SHADE.

My lover sleeps in a strange woman's arms.

AIDONEUS.

If separate love be such as this, I cannot

Sever thee from Eurydice, lest I
Suffer the same torment even in thought.

ORPHEUS.

Give me Eurydice, and I will heal
Instantly the wounds that I have made.

AIDONEUS.

Summon Eurydice!

[THE SHADES *depart. They return surrounding*
EURYDICE. *She sees ORPHEUS and holds out*
her hands.

EURYDICE.

A little longer,
I must have melted into mist. The pain
Could not be borne, even though I live no more.

[ORPHEUS *takes her in his arms. She lies there silent.*

ORPHEUS.

I will heal up those wounds which I have made—

I will play Persephone to forgetfulness.

[He plays; gradually THE SHADES fall back listlessly; the longing fades from PERSEPHONE'S face and that of AIDONEUS grows once more stern and menacing. In silence, with bowed head, ORPHEUS and EURYDICE move away, ORPHEUS still playing.]

THE WIND

THE WIND

GONDRA
PELINORE

SCENE: *A chamber in a high tower. A table is set as though for a feast.*

GONDRA.

HARK! how the wind howls thee a welcome!

PELINORE.

In wrath

That thou hast rescued me from its unkindness,
From its sharp teeth and from the night—but how
Camst thou so wonderfully 'twixt the wind and me?

GONDRA [*laughs*].

Oh! traveller in waste ways! hast thou not heard
How in the mist a spirit sits and signs,

Shaped like a fair woman—but he who follows
Ends in some desolate drift or forlorn fen,
And dies there; also in each bush at nightfall
Lurks a sprite of disaster, and these castles
Which seem most solid-built, are but light vapour,
Melting like cloud when the sun shines on them. This
May be such a castle and I such a lady:
Art not afraid?

PELINORE.

I should be afraid
In any place in the world which is not here.

GONDRA.

Oh! thou most ready dupe of dreams! Thy feet
Must move for ever tangled in a net
Cast by some lying spirit to perplex thee!
And yet how haughtily is thy head set!
Thy sword should be a clear mirror of courage!
Danger and song thy brethren—I can see
Thou wert conceived in the sunlight. Thou hast come

Lightly hither like a flash of flame
From the singing countries.

PELINORE.

The white highway
Has been mine so long, that scarcely I remember
The manner of my starting; a shaken flame
Leapt in my face, dazzling me, turned to song
In my ears as I followed it—on I went
Through a world of fragrance and of gold,
Straight as a bird's song, straight as a homing bird,
Hither.

GONDRA.

Hither?—Why, truly, night
Should follow morning!

PELINORE.

This is morning; the other,
When I started, was but shadow.

THE WIND

GONDRA.

Oh! thou blind man!

Knowing not light from darkness!

PELINORE.

Lady, what art thou?

GONDRA.

Ask the wind.

PELINORE.

I think thou art the wind

In a garment of flame.

GONDRA.

Fear me then, lest my breath put thee out

Who art all fire.

PELINORE.

Nay, but that wind which fans

Sparks to heaven and at sunset blows

The cold seas into glory! Thou couldst kiss

So easily the latent fires of earth
To leap forth—crimson and gold pennons,
In a battle against darkness!

GONDRA.

Find some other
Name for me, some kinder name,
More befitting a friend.

PELINORE.

I have never seen
A woman like thee, else my lips would yearn
To call thee woman!

GONDRA.

Ah! I beseech thee
By no such suffering word call me; too full
Of crying in the night before day comes,
And the heart will neither break outright nor sleep.
Too much of flesh is in it; burden not

Thy bright tongue with the heaviness of it: I
Will find for thy thoughts of me another name,
Not human enough for tears, yet not so light
But tears shall be somehow hidden in it, like streams
Running softly underground in green meadows.
So when the sun-shaft shining along thy sword-blade
Calls thee forth to-morrow, thou shalt carry
The thought of me pricked in thy heart, as one
May wear his lady's favour in his helm,
With a strange, heady perfume, like the scent
Half-forgotten, of a rose plucked in dreams.

PELINORE.

Oh! never in all my dreams has such a rose
Blossomed, not in any of sleep's ways
Wherein I have adventured!

GONDRA.

We might have met,
You and I, in some such ways of sleep,

Did I not fly from dreams—all night—all night.
Dreams which pursue me with great eyes ablaze
And sharp talons!

*[She rises, moves restlessly to and fro and goes to
the window.]*

Ah! the wind, how it howls! Will it never be silent,
The wind! *[She draws the curtain aside and looks out.]*
Oh! how dark the night is, a gulf
Of sheer darkness! We are standing
On the banks of a precipice which reaches
Down to the roots of the world, where fire is.
It is so black the night, so starless,
Almost we might see our faces, thine and mine,
Reflected in it, as in very profound
Water; but if we lean out too far,
Straining towards our image reflected there,
We may over-balance and fall—fall—fall—
Downwards together through the black air,
Where no light at all may reach us and no glimpse
Of the blue heaven ever again—yet together
In the darkness.

THE WIND

PELINORE.

Why dost thou speak thus? So sadly,
And as though from a long way off?

GONDRA.

Peace! peace! oh! peace!

Let me be sad a little, very quietly sad,
As children at nightfall; as I have not been
All my days. Yet I would not repent
My sins, nor weep for any wrong done, but let
Sadness, like a gray mother, draw my head
Down upon her bosom and softly kiss
All thought away from me, bidding me sleep,
Since she will tell me I have sinned no more
Than children may before God has smiled upon them,
As God has not smiled on me till this hour—

[She turns on Pelinore fiercely.]

As God has not smiled on me till this hour!
Why didst thou come to me, out of the night,
Out of the wind, out of the darkness, to break
My darkness?

PELINORE.

'Twas *thou* didst save me from the night
And the darkness, drawing me in from it.

GONDRA.

Would that the night had swallowed thee up alive!
For I see that hither thou hast brought a great light
To consume me.

PELINORE.

What light is that?

GONDRA.

It burns, it burns!

Like white heaven—like red hell.

PELINORE.

Like love,

Which hath both names!

GONDRA.

Silence! silence! silence!

THE WIND

PELINORE.

My heart breaks with silence: must I keep silence
Still?

GONDRA.

The wind is in my ears—what art thou saying?
I will not hear!

PELINORE.

Oh! lady of night and wind, no more of silence:
I love thee!

GONDRA.

So calmly might an archangel speak
The downfall of the world!

PELINORE.

I love thee—I spring to thee
Unhesitating, as song from the heart,
In the moment of victory. I have loved thee always,
But saw thee first, now, when the mist parted
About thee, in the night.

GONDRA.

Enough! thy voice
Is burning on my closed eyelids. Grant me
A little space, wherein my eyes may open.

PELINORE.

The mist parted; I saw thee
In a circle of torches. Thou didst stand
Flame amongst flame. The mist about thee
Was a haze of golden light, where-from thy face
Shone out as from a halo. I would have knelt,
Only my eyes were fixed upon thy face
Which held me motionless.

GONDRA [*aside*].

I will not speak.—
All my days God has not given me dreams.
It is my right to dream once—for the end
Comes, and silence.

THE WIND

PELINORE.

Then like a prayer thy voice
Called me out of the night: I followed——

GONDRA [*dully*].

My voice
Which called thee like a prayer out of the night.

PELINORE.

To thy feet, to thy heart, to thy lips,
To thee.—Beloved!

GONDRA [*aside*].

If he should kiss me now,
Must I break silence?

PELINORE.

Yet have I strength to seal
My life to thine—thus— [He kisses her.]

GONDRA.

Thus for ever—sealed

For ever through all time sealed to thee,

Oh! my one lover!

PELINORE.

How thou hast not loved

Before!—Oh! miracle!—Is this the first

Kiss which has blossomed on thy lips, and I

To pluck it thus!

GONDRA [*slowly*].

I have not loved before.

PELINORE [*exultingly*].

I have not lived

Before, at any time; not when life washed

About my feet in blue waves, silver-curved,

Dancing in the sun, silver and blue,

And rainbow-shot, and I set sail—set sail,

Not knowing whither!—

Oh! the core of the world is a heart of joy; its face

Is sour and wrinkled, but joy lives at its heart;
It is a withered beldame, singing songs in the sunlight,
And evil is no more than a wind blowing
About a fire it cannot put out.

GONDRA [*aside*].

To weep

One's soul away! Alas! my eyes are dry
As my soul.

PELINORE.

To-morrow—to-morrow
I will toss my joy up in the sunlight and watch it glisten
And catch it back like a sword into my hand!

GONDRA.

Oh! torment!——

PELINORE.

Now let me drink, in wine red as life's heart
To this new triumph of the world: delight
In a cup with dreams sparkling upon the brink——

[*He pours wine into a goblet. GONDRA springs up,
and speaks, half-swooning.*]

GONDRA.

Nay——

PELINORE.

Not my red, laughing
 Dream? But I must feel the taste of it on my lips!
*[He raises the goblet—with a cry GONDRA dashes it
 from him.]*

GONDRA.

Nay—thou shalt not drink death!
*[He stands bewildered and amazed—she speaks
 rapidly.]*

Life is a ruin

Wherefrom I call as from a ruinous house
 A leper: I am a leper—didst thou not guess?
 Why do you suddenly gaze with sightless eyes
 Upon me?

*[PELINORE'S lips move as though to speak. She
 prevents him.]*

Listen—listen, you must not speak!

Kill me in the end without a word;
That is the best way—but first hear all,
All! There is no escape: I am
Nothing but a lure, a light o' love,
Sent out into the darkness to bring death
To travellers such as you. Here is the feast
Of death, and here the wine——

They come—they come,
Whose wanton I am—and you must ride—ride—ride!—
You must not even answer—you must go—I lost
Count of time—I had forgotten—they are here,
At the gates perhaps!
Go!—mount your horse—go!
And forget me, for ever.——

PELINORE [*he speaks as though in a dream*].

So it seems
That after all I may serve thee, whom I thought
So far above my service—the very sun
And the stars shone nearer.

GONDRA.

What is this?

PELINORE.

I kissed you

As it seems now a million years ago,
Shall I deny that kiss?

GONDRA.

Hell has opened since.

PELINORE.

Is love so weak that it will shrink from Hell?
Am I so weak that I will ride without you?

GONDRA.

With you?—into the night?

PELINORE.

Into the dawn—
Where the night shall never find us more.

GONDRA.

With you

Beside me, in the unaccustomed peace—
Safe! Safe!

Ah! God!

*[She stands hesitating for a moment, then cries
wildly.]*

Never!—it may not be!

I love you not. Go!—trouble me not—go!

Must you burn me with your eyes, who am so weak? I hate
you!

Out through the door! I was but lying when I said
I loved you—by God's death, I was but lying!
Away with you, into the night—make haste——

PELINORE.

If I had drunk I had been dead by now—

No more than that—dead and all finished for ever.

[He goes out without turning his head.]

GONDRA *[she stands musing]*.

Now, shall I wait and die upon their swords?

Shriek out what I have done and when they strike,
Laugh and die laughing? That were a good death—
To mock at every separate thrust, till they
Went mad and struck faster and faster! Yet
The clamour—the fierce faces! I who long
So deeply for silence—I who long for silence
And no light.

Here is the wine untasted,
Death coloured like fire—a few sharp frantic pangs
Like fire!

Ah! me! If I had gone with him
There had been a clean beginning; lovely dawn
Of white, up-leaping, purifying flame,
And our two lives washed together in flame—
No—no—I am too old!

I am as old
As the first sin, who have eyes and lips so young,
You would never guess beholding them, my soul
Was bent and agued, with cursed wrinkled brows—
And when the face fades, then the soul shows through.
How could I bring my lover such a gift?

He should have come to me when cold Spring airs
Blew threw a little valley near the sea,
Where I dwelt once—

Once—now, it is too late.

Ah!—cries! They come!

Which shall it be? Sharp death

Or sleep?

Or sleep. When have I slept
As soundly as I shall sleep now? His kiss
Folded on my lips—his kiss must not be broken,
Nor profaned, but stay inviolate for ever.—
I am too tired—I cannot meet the swords.

[She drinks.]

AN ODE

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AN ODE

1913

FLAME!—

What is this light which grows apace
Flaring up in the moon's face?

From the close dark,

A dreadful spark,

As of a star which has no name,

A burning mist, out of blind depths uphurled,

From which God's hands may fashion a new world?—

Or is it war, gaunt, mad,

Which rises thus, fire-clad?

Old war for a little breathing space

Grown indolent and tame,

Now vehement, and still the same,

Seeking blindly for the food which once it had.

Not war, not war,
Not war 'twixt men and men
Is this wild flame which throws its light afar
Across the sky, then sinks again ;
Not the fierce grip of hand to hand,
For plunder, women, power or land,
But a stranger thing,
Than ever was conceived by priest or king.
A thing so strange, so new,
Scarcely the dull world may believe it true,
But laughs uneasily and turns
Its face away so that it may not see,
Daring not understand,
That such indeed may be:
Ah! but it burns,
True fire, however blindly lit,
Scorching all those who would extinguish it!

Who are these riding forth
In triumph, ecstasy or wrath?
Who are these who would break

The kingdoms of the earth and make
A burning path for their dream's sake?
Ruthlessly sparing neither roof nor spire,
But in the frenzy of their ire,
In Church or Senate or before the throne,
Whirling the torch of Revolution?
These are women; hold your breath,
And ponder. These are women—these
Who show like foam raging white
And wind-blown upon furious seas,
White spume upon the lips of death;
Once did they sit at home and sleep at ease,
Now they ride forth blindly in the night.

Once long ago,
So is the echo borne across the years,
(The lost, forlorn, sweet fragrant years, ah! me!)
On golden shores deep set,
In that blue, enchanted,
Amorous, smiling, rainbow-circled sea,
God-desired, syren-haunted,

Where now, ah me! where now no vessel steers—
Among the hills, between the olive-groves,
So made for shimmering silent loves,
Yea, in that golden land such things were done,
The clang of swords, the clash of spears,
Rang there, a bitter war, unnatural strife,
Life waging war on life,
Women fighting with men beneath the sun.

Ah! turn thy face away!
This is no good thing for the light of day;—
This is horror, this is
Wrong followed by a blacker Nemesis,
Than ever implacably pursued
Orestes spattered with his mother's blood;
This is the saddest birth
Ever brought forth by the mild earth.

Justice, whose slow feet
Cannot keep measure with man's dreams,
And who for ever seems

Somehow for all her splendour incomplete,
Stands now bewildered, pales,
And fears to trust her trembling scales;
Nor does she know
Which way to go,
Whether to strike or spare;
Yet has the conflagration singed her hair,
Yet has her majesty grown less,
She falters on, she will not dare,
Let her beware,
Lest while her lamp so wanly gleams,
All men shall profit by her feebleness!

Justice, why hast thou turned
Thy head, thy royal head, away so long?
Has thy divinity
Grown weak, grown impotent, grown cold?
Wouldst thou not heed what time thine altars burned
With sacrifice lit by a white-robed throng
Of suppliants who kissed thy garments' fold
And worshipped thee with praise, with song,

With love, with exultation—now
Has that praise fallen which was thine of old?
Elsewhere they worship (they
Who patiently besought thee yesterday)
Wildly they proclaim
Aloud thou art not and blaspheme thy name,
And thou,
Since fire is at thy very temple door,
Dost raise a little thy white brow
To hear—oh! thou so careless of thy fame
Through the years gone before!

The frantic throng sweeps raging by
Of women, each with a bright brand
Fiery within her hand
To speed her wrongs up to the sky.
Alas! that the old feud
'Twixt force and reason still should be renewed.—
Man's wandering spirit gropes
Weakly for truth and misses, and conceives
Error and stumbling through the dark destroys

What adorations, hopes,
Beatitudes and fragile joys!
Yet in the end the gray mist parts and leaves
Him mounted a little higher on the slopes.

Slowly, slowly he ascends,
The journey never ends,
Yet he ascends ever, led
By those wild gleams wherewith his soul is fed
Of the Morn's inextinguishable red.
What profit then to complicate his way
With the torch rekindled of dead yesterday?
With ancient violence, ever more akin
To folly, misery and sin?
With vain departed terrors laid aside?
With weapons chosen from an armoury
Of which tired, outworn passions hold the key,
To drive him, faltering on a path untried?
Not thus Truth's feet on her sure journey move,
But silently as rain,
Which falls like tears of pity and of love,

Upon the dry, reluctant, sun-scorched plain.—
Very slowly, very silently,
She moves—a veil across her eyes,
So that men know her not until
Suddenly
The unseen presence of her makes them wise,
And one by one the scales of ill
Drop from them and they see the skies,
Full of fresh light increasing still.

Weave not therefore
O women, iron-hearted, brave,
Sitting aloft on the full crest of the wave
Which breaks at last on that far shore
Where Womanhood triumphant stands,
New beauty in her eyes and breast and hands,
Rash webs of wrong, which bind
So close, so fine—the years
Are caught and caged in the envenomed strands,
And only at the weary last can find
Freedom from that pernicious mesh

Through strife, begetting strife afresh,
Through violence, misery and tears!
Oh! ye who run
Fore-speeding those who have not seen the sun,
There is no hand that may put back the dawn;
Ye may be calm—your goal already won!
But let the way to it
Be strewn, not as of old, with trophies of defeat,
Hate, and his foolish, deaf, unseeing host;
These are the weapons of those whose day is lost.
Ye may be calm whom all the years conspire
To crown—what have *ye* to do with ruin and fire?

PRISON

THE moments like small stinging pebbles fall
Upon the soul, hurting it, one by one,
Slow and monotonous. On the blank wall
The sick beams glimmer of a joyless sun
Which speaks of no glad, free, triumphant skies,
Nor morning, but of hard, perpetual noon,—
Such noon as broods above a shadowless street
Made up of noise and squalor, dust and flies;
Only here there is no sound of human feet,
But a dead silence—silence with no boon
Of sleep or quiet; a most thrice-accursed
Silence, which leaves the spirit free to move
In horror, loneliness, hunger and thirst,
Through a world naked of all human love,
Bare as a whitewashed wall, a cruel, white,
Shadowless world—with nothing left therein
Save justice looking neither to left nor right,
And one man overtaken by his sin.

ON THE LEADEN RING OFFERED TO
KING MANUEL OF PORTUGAL BY
THE ROYALIST PRISONERS

THIS ring,
Offered in homage to the exiled King,
By the frail fingers of the living dead,
Was fashioned not of gold but lead;
Yet doth shine forth in all men's eyes
Flame of unconquerable loyalties;
The very fervour, passion and beat
Of Life which will not stoop from its high seat
To flatter tyrants but in their despite
Stands forth for its own Liberty and Light,
And doth entreat the prison and the sword
As an exceeding great reward.

What will ye do,
Who have cast out the old, brought in the new

With blood, with blasphemy, with chains,
Yet find that still the old remains
More strong, more fervent, more declared?
The sword which once was sheathed leaps bared;
And all this dust ye trample on,
Cleaves close, more sure foundations for a throne.
The soul denied here blocks your way
Even more than the body's broken clay.
How may ye prove,
Fronting such sacrificial love,
The faith close-welded in this leaden ring
Is but a pitiful, small, abject thing?
Oh! ye who dare not give
To others than yourselves the right to live,
Having no vision wherewith to oppose
The dream of your triumphant foes;
What have ye dared for Liberty
Save to exploit her? These men die.
How shall ye then suffice to break
Those who have wrought this ring for Freedom's sake?

ROMANCE

COME, come to me!
I am the Sea,
I am all that can never be;
The whirling wave, the steady light
Of ships slow sailing out into the night;
Wind, wave and leaping spray,
And the lands which are very far away;
Every rainbow-circled shore,
Where you may stay
A night and a day,
No more!
I kiss your eyes and leave them blind;
I am around you and above;
I am the road that lies before,
And behind;
I am Morning—I am Love!

I shake my gleaming,
My sun-splashed wings,
Whilst you lie dreaming
Of other things.—
The sun shakes your grating,
The wind's at the door;
Oh! ride forth for all the world is waiting
And come back no more!

Am I not fair
With my wishing cap on my gold hair?
Am I not fleet
Who have feathered shoulders and winged feet?
Listen! listen! have you heard
Such a song ever,
As now beneath the wandering moon I sing?
Each wild-winged bird
Whose throat is mad with Spring,
Has sought to learn it and might never!
Listen!—wheresoe'r I pass
Laughter stirs among the grass,

And the withered tree,
Breaks into leaf,
And Grief,
Lays aside her heart, tear-laden,
And becomes my waiting-maiden,
Serving me!

I am the sheath, I am the sword,
And I am flame: I set alight
Cities that men may make
Songs of that burning for my sake,
And yield their souls up at a word.
It may be I shall turn my head
And with my eyes' flash strike you dead,
What matters it?
You will have lived as only they
Who do my bidding may.
Of what avail to sit
In comfort, ease and slow decay,
Watching the slow ash, bit by bit,
Crumble away?

What care though I destroy
Who have re-christened Death and called him Joy,
And have taught Laughter
To the sharp-visaged, horny-fingered Fates.—
Oh! if I lead you dancing through Hell's gates
What matter what comes after?

Come, come to me!
I am the moon, I am the sea;
I am every ship that sails
Trackless waters, knowing not
Where she steers.
I am the light which never fails;
I am a golden knot
Binding together the loose years.
I sparkle and run
Like glass in the moonlight, like frost in the sun,
And when you have found me, then life has begun.
Therefore be bold,
Of my hand take hold,
And swing in the track of my garment's fold!

Cling to me, follow me, set your heart free;
I am all that can never be,
A song, a spell, a key of gold,
Which can unlock the earth and the sea:—
Come, come, oh! come with me!

“QUANDO VENIRET VER MEUM?”

NOW over the brown hill
Spring rises like a star,
And scatters with glad will
Her treasure near and far,
And Earth, Spring's pensioner,
Joins lightly in a maze of dances,
Since the cold, long-sleeping blood of her
Has turned to wine beneath the Sun's kind glances:—
Oh! festal, royal Sun
Of Spring's nativity,
Hast thou of all thy robes of joy not one
For me, for me?

I have waited over long
In many a shadowed place,
For (ah!) once heard—a song,
And (ah!) once seen—a face;

Once in a dream, but swift
Night's river chill and gray
Carried both in a drift
Of drowning dreams away:—
Outward, onward borne
On that chill, hurrying stream
Until far off in the leaping sea of morn
I lost my dream.

My Spring, my Dream, most rare!
When shall I find thee, when?
This spring is not so fair
She is for all men.—
This spring goes with the wind,
She is young, she is glad,
Sweet but of common-kind,
Mine moves like a Queen clad;
Not in any secret way
Shall ye find her or know
In what soft paths of fallen flowers to-day
Her white feet go.

I am so sick for her

Who wait till she shall pass,

In shining robes like lily-leaves astir,

Or twilight on the grass.

Her hands are cool like deep

Waters on a summer's eve;

In her eyes, innocent as sleep,

No memories awake or grieve.—

I have searched the house of Day, the house of Night,

And found no place at all where she might be:—

When shall my Spring come, when shall my Delight

Come, come to me?

A SONG

WHAT have you done with the dream I brought you
Late last night at the fall of the dew?
Over the brink of the world I sought you
And never paused and came to you.
A dream of golden and purple feather,
Let us follow its flight together:
The fairest dream that ever spread
In the moonlight shining wings;
It perched in the blossom overhead
Of the apple tree where my soul sings,
Sings of you. It came, it came.
When through the dark no least star shone;
I knew not if 'twas star or bird or flame
But stretched my hand out and it perched thereon.
Sweet, sweet, ah sweet!—
See how its pinions glisten!

A SONG

All love, all joy is in their beat,
And in their sultry plumage. Listen
To its enchanting strain!
Like sorrow turned to laughter;
Like the sound of rain
Falling in desert places or
Delight no weariness comes after,
Long waited for
Which still renews itself again.

OH! MY DEAR!

THE wind has scattered the leaves down
And made a path so bright and clean,
For some high lord to tread thereon,
Or for Lightfoot, the fairy Queen.
Or—for you!
No, my dear, no.—
And yet it might be so,
If dreams came true!

My eyes have grown so bitter-bright
I could see you a mile away,
Any time by day or night,
Oh! will you never come this way?
You I'm wearying for,
Day out, day in;
Oh, why can't I just rise and open wide the door,
And drag you in!

I know you'll never come, and yet
Like a puzzled ghost am I
Who must have wrought some crime, for it
Safe and sleeping cannot lie.
Oh! my dear,
Here's Autumn and the fall.—
And all you said last year
Meant nothing after all!

If the roads are light to you,
They are very heavy for my feet.
I think that I will die and forget and forget you,
And not care though we never meet.

Oh! my dear—
I wish that you were dead.
I wish that you were dead and loving me and here,
With the broken earth for your bed!

My own dear—
And never a word to be said;
I wish that you were dead and lying very near
My heart a pillow for your head!

A PROPHECY

FIRE shall absolve thee. Thy immense delays,
Thy silent, bleak, unmemorable days,
All thy waste words, thy passions come to naught,
The pauses and limitations of thy thought,
Shall in one blast of windy rapture, glow
Such a flame, as only those altars know
Which the very god's secret, still silent breath
Touches and the dark ashes leap from death.
So thy feet faltering, and thy hands which long
Have vainly sought and thy heart athirst for song,
Shall meet at last in some sequestered place
Thy dream, thy dream living and face to face!
Yea, and beside thy dream no memory
Nor mark of all thy life left upon thee,
Nor proof that thou hast been save sprung from this
Dream, a new song wherein thy whole soul is;

Wherefrom, re-born, thou shalt again arise
Swift on the track of finer ecstasies.
These are thy deaths and births—this is thy life;
All else to thee is little more than strife
Of winds, or phantoms urging their dim flight
Through the forlorn, lost solitudes of night.



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